

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 0973

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

BERLIN ALSO FOR USMISSION BERLIN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CSCE, CVIS, BU
SUBJECT: NON-IMMIGRANT VISA FEES

REF: STATE 094916

1. SUMMARY. WE RECOMMEND AGAINST APPROACHING GOB
TO SUGGEST RECIPROCAL ELIMINATION OF VISA FEES.
BULGARIANS UNDOUBTEDLY WOULD COUNTER WITH SUGGESTION
BOTH SIDES ELIMINATE VISA REQUIREMENTS. THEIR
INTERNAL POLICE CONTROLS ON VISITORS ARE SUFFICIENTLY
RIGOROUS AND EFFECTIVE SO THAT THEY CAN DO THIS; OURS
ARE NOT. WE RECOMMEND INSTEAD THAT WE RAISE OUR
CONFIDENTIAL

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VISA FEES TO MATCH THEIRS, NOW EFFECTIVELY SET AT
\$16.67 FOR VISITORS AND TOURISTS. END SUMMARY

2. PRIOR TO JANUARY 1, 1976, BULGARIA OBSERVED A

UNILATERAL VISA-FREE POLICY TOWARD TOURISTS VISITING BULGARIA, REGARDLESS OF NATIONALITY. UNDER THIS POLICY BONA-FIDE TOURISTS AND TRANSIENTS COULD PRESENT THEMSELVES AT BULGARIAN POINTS OF ENTRY WITHOUT PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION AND WITHOUT CHARGE. A BONA-FIDE TOURIST WAS DEFINED AS ANYONE STAYING AT A HOTEL OR OTHER BALKANTOURIST FACILITY. ANYONE ELSE, FOR EXAMPLE PERSONS VISITING AND STAYING WITH FRIENDS OR RELATIVES, WERE REQUIRED TO OBTAIN A "VISITORS" VISA FROM A BULGARIAN DIPLOMATIC INSTALLATION ABROAD FOR WHICH THERE WAS A FEE OF \$2.60. ON JANUARY 1, 1976, BULGARIA DISCONTINUED THIS VISA-FREE REGIME FOR ALL BUT THE CITIZENS OF WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES AND THOSE COUNTRIES WITH WHICH IT HAS BILATERAL VISA-FREE AGREEMENTS: E.G. SWEDEN AND AUSTRIA. VISAS ARE NOW AVAILABLE AT THE POINT OF ENTRY FOR AMERICAN CITIZEN HOLDERS OF TOURIST PASSPORTS, BUT THERE IS A VISA FEE OF THE EQUIVALENT OF 10 LEVA (\$10.42) IN CONVERTIBLE CURRENCY PLUS A 6 LEVA (\$6.25) SURCHARGE IF THE VISA IS PURCHASED AT THE POINT OF ENTRY RATHER THAN AT A BULGARIAN DIPLOMATIC INSTALLATION ABROAD. TRANSIENT VISAS NOW COST 5 LEVA (\$5.20). THIS REQUIREMENT DOES NOT PERTAIN TO PERSONS VISITING BULGARIA ON PREPAID BALKANTOURIST TOURS.

3. PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 1974, THERE WAS A REQUIREMENT FOR ALL NON-OFFICIAL VISITORS TO BULGARIA TO CHANGE AT LEAST \$3.00 OR THE EQUIVALENT IN OTHER CONVERTIBLE CURRENCY INTO LEVA FOR EACH DAY OF STAY IN BULGARIA. IN NOVEMBER 1974 THAT REQUIREMENT WAS RAISED TO \$10.00 PER DAY. THIS REQUIREMENT DOES NOT APPLY TO PERSONS VISITING BULGARIA ON PREPAID BALKANTOURIST TOURS.

4. BULGARIAN DIPLOMATIC INSTALLATIONS HAVE, IN OUR EXPERIENCE, CONSISTENTLY DISCOURAGED PROSPECTIVE CONFIDENTIAL

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TOURISTS FROM OBTAINING VISAS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY PRIOR TO PRESENTING THEMSELVES AT POINTS OF ENTRY. THUS, FOR PRACTICAL PURPOSES, A VISIT TO BULGARIA BY THE AVERAGE TOURIST OR VISITOR COSTS \$16.67 IN VISA CHARGES PLUS THE REQUIREMENT TO CHANGE \$10.00 INTO LEVA FOR EACH DAY HE REMAINS IN COUNTRY.

5. OUR CURRENT \$2.60 FEE FOR B-1, F, H, I, J, AND L NON-IMMIGRANT VISAS IS BASED ON THE PRE-JANUARY 1976 BULGARIAN VISA FEE SCHEDULE.

6. IN THE UNITED STATES, SUCH CONTROL ON VISITORS AS EXISTS IS EXERTED THROUGH OUR VISA AND ENTRY

SYSTEM. ONCE A PERSON HAS ENTERED THE U.S. EFFECTIVE CONTROL IS LOST OR GREATLY REDUCED. IN BULGARIA, ON THE OTHER HAND, EXTREMELY TIGHT CONTROLS IN THE FORM OF ADDRESS REGISTRATION AND OTHER TECHNIQUES ARE EXERCISED ON RESIDENTS AND VISITORS ALIKE. TO THE GOB, THEREFORE, THE VISA AND ENTRY SYSTEM IS OF RELATIVELY LITTLE IMPORTANCE. THEY RECOGNIZE THAT AN AGREEMENT TO ABOLISH VISAS TAKEN WITH A COUNTRY WITHOUT EFFECTIVE INTERNAL CONTROLS IS VERY MUCH TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. THIS HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED BY THE AUSTRIAN AND SWEDISH EXPERIENCE AND BY RECENT BULGARIAN OVERTURES TO SOME WESTERN COUNTRIES TO BILATERALLY ABOLISH VISA REQUIREMENTS.

7. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT AN APPROACH TO THE GOB BASED ON THE FINAL ACT OF CSCE AS SUGGESTED IN REFERENCE WOULD BE IMMEDIATELY COUNTERED BY THE BULGARIANS WITH THE OFFER TO BILATERALLY ABOLISH ALL REQUIREMENTS FOR VISAS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. OUR NECESSARY REFUSAL WILL LEAVE US OPEN TO CHARGES OF HYPROCRISY AND OR IMPEDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FINAL ACT; AN OPENING THE BULGARIANS MIGHT NOT HESITATE TO EXPLOIT.

8. AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH WOULD BE FOR US TO ADJUST OUR VISA CHARGES UPWARD, MAKING IT VERY CLEAR TO THE GOB THAT THE ADJUSTMENT IS MADE NECESSARY BY CONFIDENTIAL

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THEIR RECENT INCREASE IN VISA FEES, NOTING THAT IT HAS LONG BEEN OUR POLICY TO ELIMINATE VISA FEES WHENEVER POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE TRAVEL BETWEEN STATES, AND STATING THAT WE ARE PREPARED TO REDUCE OR ELIMINATE VISA FEES TO BULGARIAN CITIZENS ON A RECIPROCAL BASIS.
FELDMAN

CONFIDENTIAL

<< END OF DOCUMENT >>

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